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THE OLD STATE-HOUSE

DEFENDED

FROM UNFOUNDED ATTACKS UPON ITS INTEGRITY.

BEING A REPLY

TO

DR. G. H. MOORE'S SECOND PAPER,

READ BEFORE THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY, FEB. 9, 1886.

BY

WILLIAM H. WHITMORE.

BOSTON :

1886.

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FELLOW-MEMBERS OF THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY:—

I feel obliged to make some reply to a pamphlet which has been sent to all our members, being a second paper relating to the Old State-House, read before our society February 9, 1886, by Dr. George H. Moore.

In a previous paper Dr. Moore asserted that "No such division of the space on the second floor, as the present, existed at any time during the official use of the building by the Legislature, Colonial, Provincial, Revolutionary, or State."

In 1885 I reprinted, by permission, this first paper in a new edition of the Memorial Volume respecting this building issued by the city, and I made such denial of his assertion as I thought warranted. This second paper is his reply, and it may seem to require a second rejoinder.

I hasten to say that our society need not fear the result of this second attack. Dr. Moore has not produced any new evidence, and we may continue to occupy these halls, and to invite the public to view them, with a well-founded belief that in the main they are a faithful reproduction of what did exist.

I will add that the whole matter is a "tempest in a teapot." The walls, the floors, and the window-spaces are what they were a century ago. Even the eastern hall is allowed, by Dr. Moore, to be the counterpart of the old Council Chamber. The whole controversy falls under two heads:—

First, did the Legislature, between 1776 and 1796, ever remove the lobby and stair-way which occupied eleven feet of the west end of Representatives' Hall?

Second, was there a main stair-way in the centre of the building, between the Council Chamber and Representatives' Hall? If so, was it, probably, a circular one?

Dr. Moore answers both of these questions in the negative.

and with an amount of confidence which may impose upon the casual reader. But careful examination will show that this confidence is innate, and is shown throughout his essay without regard to the testimony to support it.

“I only wish,” said Lord Dudley, “that I was as sure of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything.”

As to the first point, there is no dispute that in 1776 the Legislature gave power to their committee “to make the alterations proposed, or such alterations as they shall judge best.” The plan proposed was to remove the partition within eleven feet of the west end of the building, to be used as a lobby and entry-way, with a gallery over the same, and stairs to go up in the north-west corner of the house.

I admit that the new evidence produced by Dr. Moore (pp. 18, 19) shows that the galleries were continued; but, if I were captious, I could urge that his quotation on p. 19, from the *Centinel* of October 27, 1787, — “the galleries were crowded,” — would imply more than one gallery, and therefore a change from the plan of 1776.

But all this is surmise, for no new witness has been found to show the size of the rooms. The account dated 1791, printed on pp. 63-4 of my Memorial Volume, remains as the only contemporary evidence. That account, *as I stated*, says the length of the Representatives’ Hall was fifty-seven and a half feet. Waiving for the moment the question of the accuracy of this account, what would these figures show? The known measurements would be:—

The west lobby	11 feet
Representatives’ Hall	57½ “
Council Chamber	32 “
	<hr/>
	100½ “
Leaving	9½ “

to make the total of 110 feet cited in the account. The re-

sult is, that at most $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet, allowing nothing for partition walls, would be left for the eastern stair-way and the "convenient lobby for committees [of the Senate] to transact business in."

Now I would ask, is it reasonable to suppose that the only stair-way to the Council Chamber, a room occupied by the Governor as well, was planned and built in a space of 7 to 10 feet in length? This stair-way, also, was to furnish the principal entrance to Representatives' Hall, being the one nearest to the two main doors on the ground floor. The width was 32 feet, and if we allow one-half for the Council lobby (surely 16×9 feet is not a very large one), this stair-way, with landings on each side, was shut up in the similar space of 16 feet wide and 9 feet long. This is Dr. Moore's theory; but I still deem it impossible.

On the other hand, I suggested (Memorial Volume, p. 63) that for fifty-seven and one-half feet we read thirty-seven and a half, saying, that "evidently the writer put his notes of the measurements in figures, and either he or the printer mistook" them. I should suppose that no one could misunderstand my argument, viz.: that the *notes* of the measurements were made in figures, but in extending for the press the figures were read as $57\frac{1}{2}$, and printed "fifty-seven and one-half," according to my citation. Dr. Moore, however (pp. 57, 58), wastes much time and space in accusing me of an error which I did not make.

I will add one more indication that the writer in 1791 made notes in figures, and misread them in extending the measurements into words. He says of the building: "It is 110 feet in length and thirty-eight in breadth." Now, in fact, the inside measurement is just about 110 feet. It may vary a foot, according to the exact points of measurement; but it is only 32 feet in breadth inside, and it is not 38 feet outside, though of course nearer that figure. But, evidently, the writer meant to give both dimensions according to the same measure, inside or out. His 110-foot measure is inside,

therefore his 38 was meant to be. But the true inside breadth is 32 or 33. Evidently it was so put down in figures and misread by the printer as 38, and so printed in words. Such a mistake is obvious, because he twice repeats that the width is thirty-two feet.

Dr. Moore's little entry-way, moreover, allows nothing for any access to the third story except by the narrow stair at the north-west corner.

The next point is in regard to a central circular stair-way. Dr. Moore says this was entirely a novelty, introduced by Isaiah Rogers at the renovation made in 1830. For this assertion there is no evidence whatever. Before we fortunately found the Rogers plan, the City Architect had demolished the modern partitions on the second story, had torn out the modern central stair-way, and had removed the modern floors. He then found the opening of a different, central, circular stair-way, and he decided that all the work thereon, especially the iron-work, was of a period far antedating 1830.

With all deference to Dr. Moore, I must say that the opinion of a skilled architect on such a matter, with the evidence before him, must outweigh a thousand times the theories of a stranger.

As to the Rogers plan I have given a fac-simile of it in my volume, and the original hangs on our walls. Every one can judge for himself whether we have rightly interpreted it.

Dr. Moore insists that Rogers entirely altered the interior of the building. His only authority is *one* citation from the *N. E. Palladium*, of September 24, 1830. He adds that "it is needless to multiply quotations from the press to the same effect." I would say that I defy him to produce any more extracts to this effect. I have had the newspapers searched carefully, without discovering another such item. They all speak of "*repairs*," as does Mayor Otis in his address.

Lastly, I would point out the improbability that the architect of the building, after placing his two main doors in the centre of the two long sides, should have neglected to build a suitable central stair-way, whether circular or not. I will call your attention to the fact that the window over each door has a greater width between it and its neighbors than exists between any other two windows. This arrangement is accounted for by the stair-way to the third floor on the east side; an arrangement evidently contemporaneous with the building and fatal to Dr. Moore's theory. I need hardly add, that, as usual, he denies this fact on his own unsupported authority.

As I began, so I close this part of my reply, by saying that Dr. Moore has presented no new facts nor authorities; that he has perverted his quotations, and that his arguments are both baseless and impossible. The whole question is trivial, and assumes importance only from the mass of irrelevant matter dragged into the discussion and intended to obscure the main issue. The City of Boston may continue to boast that it has in its old State-House the most authentic and satisfactory relic of revolutionary times which is in any way connected with important events.

Having disposed of the serious part of Dr. Moore's charges, I desire to notice briefly the personal matters. No one doubts the learning or ability of the gentleman, but it is equally notorious that some unfortunate infirmity of spirit prevents him from discussing literary matters with impartiality or courtesy. He is especially rancorous when he has an opportunity to assail any person or thing relating to Massachusetts, and he has recourse to ways in vogue in past centuries, but happily since discarded by literary men. The use of disparaging epithets applied to one's adversary; the positive denial of adverse authorities; the equally positive assertions, unaccompanied by proof; the personal spite and

enmity imported into the discussion — are relics of a barbarous past, now relegated to the columns of frontier newspapers.

I understand the change from undeserved praise in his first paper to equally undeserved abuse in his second paper is due to the fact that, in reprinting the first essay, I omitted certain personalities which have nothing to do with the historical part of his discourse. On reflection, I abide by the opinion I then held, that it was unbecoming in a gentleman invited to deliver a discourse before a literary society to avail of that opportunity to assail the City Council of Boston, to whose wise liberality that society was so greatly indebted. I will now go farther and say that hardly any gentleman would have availed of such an opportunity to disparage the object which he was pretending to extol. Even if the severity of historical truth forced him to find errors in his entertainers' possessions, courtesy might have suggested better methods of pointing out the unwelcome facts.

I shall not imitate him by replying to his sneers and misstatements so far as they affect me personally. I make no claims to be an authority on the subject of the Old State-House; and I shall gladly in the future avail of all the new facts presented by Dr. Moore or any one else. I am heartily glad that he has printed his two papers, and although many of his facts were known to me, and rejected as unsuitable to the limits of my oration, many more are both new and valuable.

As to my oration, I beg leave to add that it was prepared in accordance with a vote of the committee of the City Council, dated April 25, 1882; and that it was delivered from a printed copy, June 29, 1882. The limited time at my disposal in preparing it, or in revising it for the Memorial Volume, is my best excuse for any shortcomings. I wish it were better; but, had we waited for such an address as others could have prepared, I fear it would have been a funeral oration over the remains of our greatly threatened building.

WILLIAM H. WHITMORE.

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